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## LBJ Sought to Quell Conspiracy Talk

**O**ne of history's strangest attempts at literary collaboration is described in an internal FBI memo that tells how President Lyndon B. Johnson tried to get FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to write a book on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

It was October 1966, three years after the assassination in Dallas. Every conspiracy theorist seemed to have a scenario contradicting the Warren Commission's conclusion that the accused assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, had acted alone.

Johnson was dismayed at the public's fascination with the assassination and the persisting conspiracy theories. He had tried to close the door on the conspiracy idea by appointing a bipartisan commission of prominent public figures to investigate the assassination. Yet I later learned from sources close to Johnson that he had his own suspicions about a conspiracy.

From his earliest intelligence briefings on the assassination, Johnson privately suspected that Cuban President Fidel Castro may have ordered it. He feared that if the American people learned of this, they would demand reprisal against Cuba, which could lead to a confrontation with the Soviet Union. To prevent this, Johnson appointed the Warren Commission. I don't know whether he tried to influence its deliberations, but he was distressed that the commission's verdict was under attack three years later.

Johnson wanted to re-establish the commission's credibility and lay to rest conspiracy talk. He decided that Hoover, still a formidable figure, had

the credibility to convince the American people, once and for all, that Oswald was the lone assassin.

So LBJ, using his best behind-the-scenes technique, got his close friend, Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, to approach Hoover. Fortas was skeptical but made the overture through Hoover's trusted assistant, Cartha D. DeLoach.

DeLoach conferred with Hoover, who rejected the book idea, as Fortas had expected. According to an internal memo that DeLoach wrote on Oct. 10, 1966, he explained to Fortas "the many reasons why the director could not accede to the president's and Justice Fortas' request."

Fortas then confided, states the memo, that "he had argued with the president that it was not logical for the director to prepare this book inasmuch as the director in doing so would necessarily have to substantiate the investigative efforts of many other agencies."

But Johnson had a fallback position, which Fortas then presented. He asked that Hoover at least issue a statement on one point the critics had raised: the discrepancies between FBI reports and the Warren Commission concerning the Kennedy autopsy.

DeLoach told Fortas he "felt certain" Hoover would agree to this proposal, and he drafted such a statement. The files contain a note from Hoover about the statement, saying simply: "Let me see it, H." DeLoach told my associate Les Whitten that the matter was resolved by issuing the Hoover-approved statement in response to an inquiry from The Washington Star. As DeLoach remembered it, the statement reiterated the FBI's view that Oswald acted alone.